

Motion for Concurrence in Report

efficiency of parliament in bureaucratic, technocratic, organizational, computer terms, which I must say the Prime Minister and the President of the Privy Council seem to me to be thinking about, wherein you say there should be one hour for this, one day for that, one and a half days for that, 40 minutes for this, and 60 minutes for something else. It is not something that you can put on a tape and run through a computer. I am darned if I can see any sense in it.

But if you think of efficiency in terms of the functions of this parliament, the functions of members of parliament who are here to speak on behalf of the people of Canada, each one of them, backbench as well as frontbench, then of course you can come to a reasonable conclusion because in that case you look at a bill and see that it has only three or four clauses, the principle is not terribly controversial, and it can be dealt with in half a day. Or you look at the omnibus bill to amend the Criminal Code and you say, in discussion in committee, "This is a large bill which deals with a number of subjects, there are deep feelings about it, and we will have a debate of three, four or five days in order to be sure that every point of view is adequately expressed in parliament." That is the reason we are here.

I suggest this is the only way we can reconcile the conflict of efficiency with the need for freedom of speech. This is why we in the opposition cannot agree to leave the decision as to what is reasonable time, and the decision as to exactly how much time is to be given to what, not only in the house but in standing and select committees of the house, as members have already indicated, to the government. I do not say this because I think this government is any worse than other governments Canada has had. I happen to belong to a party and to have a philosophy that does not consider any other government has been of the best for Canada.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): You are short on experience.

Mr. Lewis: Maybe that is it. I do not say that because I do not trust the members of the government as individual human beings. I do. I am sure every other member of the opposition would agree that they are honourable men. Those who have wives do not beat them, and those who have dogs do not beat them. One can rely on their being humane and decent in normal circumstances. I had to say "those who have" for obvious reasons.

[Mr. Lewis.]

But you cannot leave this kind of power to a small group of men to control, subvert and destroy the effectiveness of this parliament to function on behalf of the Canadian people.

My time is up, Mr. Speaker. I want to end the way I started. I plead with the President of the Privy Council, as the minister responsible for the subject matter of the reports, to seriously consider making this concession to parliament, namely, leaving the committee on procedure to act by agreement for the rest of this session, knowing that he has the authority under the rules which the committee of which he was a member proposed to set up a permanent standing committee.

The President of the Privy Council gave an undertaking last night. He gave it to us, so it would certainly be good for him. When the President of the Privy Council speaks to the hon. member for Rosedale he can tell him, "I gave this undertaking to the opposition and must keep it." I refer to the undertaking that this permanent committee will review the rules that are to prevail for the remainder of the session. I plead with him to do that so this debate is not prolonged, so we can get to the legislation which the government says it wants to put before us.

If the opposition does not behave for the remainder of the session, if the committee on procedure does not function on the basis of agreement, those of us who are anxious that it function will be here at the next session to listen to his proposals for improvement. But if we show that this committee does function, surely it is better to have an allocation of time by agreement than to have one by dictatorship. I appeal to the President of the Privy Council even at this stage to accept this suggestion and to see whether we cannot have a stabilized parliament that works in co-operation, as everyone wants it to do.

Mr. Steven Otto (York East): Mr. Speaker, having listened to the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis) and others, I was quite convinced that the purpose of the new rules was to reduce the time for debate to about two months. I had to read them again to convince myself that this is not the case at all. They are not going to limit debate. We will have more time for debate because the 15 or 16 committees will take a great burden off the house and all those things we want to debate will be debated.

• (4:50 p.m.)

The question is, which subjects will be debated? Again, under the new rules the